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Edwards sc.

THO^S COOPER.

see p 28

THE MIRROR OF TASTE,

AND

DRAMATIC CENSOR.

Neque mala vel bona quæ vulgus putet.—Tacitus.

PROSPECTUS.

THE advantages of a correct judgment and refined taste in all matters connected with literature, are much greater than men in general imagine. The hateful passions have no greater enemies than a delicate taste and a discerning judgment, which give the possessor an interest in the virtues and perfections of others, and prompt him to admire, to cherish, and make them known to the world. Criticism, the parent of these qualities, therefore, mends the heart, while it improves the understanding. The influence of critical knowledge is felt in every department of social life, as it supplies elegant subjects for conversation, and enlarges the scope, and extends the duration of intellectual enjoyment. Without it, the pleasures we derive from the fine arts would be transient and imperfect; and poetry, painting, music, and that admirable epitome of life, the stage, would afford nothing more than a fugitive, useless, pastime, if not aided by the interposition of the judgment, and sent home, by the delightful process of criticism, to the memory, there to exercise

the mind to the last of life, to be the amusement of our declining years, and, when all the other faculties for receiving pleasure are impaired by old age and infirmity, to cast the sunshine of delight over the last moments of our existence.

In no age or country has the improvement of the intellectual powers of man made a larger share of the business of life than in these in which we live. In the promotion of this spirit the stage has been an instrument of considerable efficacy, and, as such, lays claim to a full share of critical examination; yet, owing to some cause, which it seems impossible to discover, that very important subject has been little attended to in this great commonwealth; and in Philadelphia, the principal city of the union, has been almost totally neglected. No apology, therefore, can be thought necessary for offering the present work to the public.

The utility of miscellanies of this kind has been sometimes called in question; nor are those wanting who condemn the whole tribe of light periodical productions, as detrimental to the advancement of solid science and erudition: yet, in the most learned and enlightened nations of Europe, magazines and periodical compilations have, for more than a century, been circulated with vast success, and, within the last twenty years, increased in price as well as number, to an extent that shows how essentially the public opinion, in that quarter of the world differs from that of the persons who condemn them.

Taking that decision as a decree without appeal, in favour of such works, the editors think themselves authorized in offering the present without any formal apology. If the perusal of such productions had a tendency to prevent the youth of the country from aspiring to deep and solid erudition, or to divert men of talents from the prosecution of more important studies, the editors would be among the last to make any addition to the stock already in circulation; but, convinced that, on the contrary, works of that kind promote the advancement of general knowledge, they have no

scruple whatever in offering this to the American people; and so firm do they feel in the conviction of its utility, that they let it go into the world, unaided by any of those arts, or specious professions which are sometimes employed, in similar cases, to excite the attention, enlist the partialities, and seduce the judgment of the public.

Of those who possess at once the talents, the leisure, and the inclination to hunt erudition into its deepest recesses, the number must ever be inconsiderable; and of that number the portion must be small indeed, who could be diverted from that pursuit by the casual perusal of light fugitive pieces. On the other hand, the great majority of mankind would be left without inducement to read, if they were not supplied, by publications of the kind proposed, with matter adapted to their circumstances, to their capacities, and their various turns of fancy; matter accessible to them by its conciseness and perspicuity, attractive by its variety and lightness, and useful by its easy adaptation to the familiar intercourse of life, and its fitness to enter into the conversation of rational society. Men whose time and labour are chiefly engrossed by the common occupations of life, have little leisure to read, none for what is called study. In books they do not search for deep learning, but for amusement accompanied with information on general topics, conveyed with brevity; happy if, in seeking relaxation from the drudgery of business, they can pick up some new particles of knowledge. For this most useful and numerous portion of society, some adequate intellectual provision ought to be made. Nor should it be imagined that, in supplying them, the general interests of literature are deserted. The frequent perusal of well collated miscellanies imparts to youth an appetite for diligent reading; by slow but certain gradation, stores the young mind with valuable ideas; accumulates in it a large stock of useful knowledge; and imperceptibly insinuates a correct and refined taste. Nor is this all. It may serve, as it often has, to rouse the indolent from the gratification of complexional sloth, and

recall the unthinking and irregular from the haunts of dissipation and vice to the blessings of serious reflection.

Few things have more tended to inflame the general passion for literature in Great Britain than the practice of uniting the plan of the reviews with that of the magazines, and making them jointly vehicles of dramatic criticism. Multitudes at this day know the character of books, and form a general conception of their subjects, who, but for the light periodical publications, would never have known that such books existed: many who would not otherwise have extended their reading beyond the columns of a newspaper, are led by the pleasures of a represented play, to read the critic's strictures upon it, and thence, by a natural transition, to peruse attentively the various other subjects which surround those strictures in the magazines. This is the reason why hundreds read the *Monthly Mirror* and similar productions of London, for one who reads the *Rambler*.

For the passionate love of books, and the rapid advancement of literature which distinguish her from all young countries, America is greatly indebted to her periodical publications. Those, though small in number, and, unfortunately, too often shortlived, have been read in their respective times and circles with great avidity, and produced a correspondent effect. *THE PORT FOLIO* alone raised, long ago, a spirit in the country which malicious Dulness itself will never be able to lay. Yet the disproportion in number of those miscellanies which have succeeded in America, to those which enrich the republic of letters in England, is astonishing, considering the comparative population of the two countries. London boasts of several periodical publications founded on the *DRAMA* alone; and though the other magazines occasionally contain short strictures on that subject, those have the greatest circulation which are most exclusively devoted to the stage.

IN AMERICA THERE HAS NOT YET BEEN ONE OF THAT DESCRIPTION.

To supply this defect, and raise the United States one step higher in laudable emulation with Great Britain, the editors have planned the present work, of which, (though not to the total exclusion of other matter) the basis will be

THE DRAMA.

The first and by far the larger share will be allotted to the stage, and dramatic productions. The residue to miscellaneous articles, most of them connected with the fashionable amusements, and designed to correct the abuses, which intemperate ignorance, and Licentiousness, running riot for want of critical control, have introduced into the public diversions of this opulent and luxurious city.

In the composition of the several parts of this work, care will be taken to furnish the public with new and interesting matter, and to select from the current productions of the British metropolis such topics as will best tend to promote the cultivation of an elegant taste for knowledge and letters, and, at the same time, repay the reader for the trouble of perusal, with amusement and delight. Abstracts from the most popular publications will be given, accompanied with short critical remarks upon them, and, whatever appears most interesting in the periodical productions of Great Britain will be transferred into this ; pruned if they be prolix, and illustrated by explanatory notes, whenever they may be found obscured by local or personal allusion.

As the leading object of the work is, not to infuse a passion, but to inculcate a just and sober taste for dramatic poetry and acting, the editors propose to give, *seriatim*, a history of the drama from its origin, with strictures on dramatic poesy, and portraits of the best dramatic poets of antiquity. To this will succeed the history of the British stage. with portraits of the most celebrated poets, authors, and actors who have flourished on it, and strictures on the profes-

sional talents of the latter, illustrated by parallels and comparisons with those who have been most noted for excellence on the American boards.

From that history the reader will be able to deduce a proper conviction of the advantages of the stage, and the importance, if not the necessity, of putting the actors and the audience on a more proper footing with each other than that in which they now stand. Actors must lay their account with being told their faults. They owe their whole industry and attention to those who attend their performance; but the editors hold that critic to have forfeited his right to correct the stage, and to be much more deserving of reprehension than those he censures, who, in the discharge of his duty, forgets that the actor has his rights and privileges also; that he has the same rights which every other gentleman possesses, and of which his profession has not even the remotest tendency to deprive him, to be treated with politeness and respect; that he has the same right as every other man in society, as the merchant, the mechanic, or the farmer, to prosecute his business unmolested; shielded by the same laws which protect them from the attacks of malicious libellers out of the theatre, and the insults of capricious Ignorance or stupid Malevolence within. "Reproof," says Dr. Johnson, "should not exhaust its power upon petty failings;" and "the care of the critic should be to distinguish error from inability, faults of inexperience from defects of nature. On this principle the editors will unalterably act. And, since they have cited the great moralist's maxim as a direction for critics, they, even in this their first step into public view, beg leave to offer a few sentiments from the same high source, for the guidance of AUDITORS. "HE THAT APPLAUDS HIM WHO DOES NOT DESERVE PRAISE IS ENDEAVOURING TO DECEIVE THE PUBLIC; HE THAT HISSES IN MALICE OR IN SPORT IS AN OPPRESSOR AND A ROBBER.*"

* Johnson's Idler, No. 25.

This work, therefore, will contain a regular journal of all, worthy of notice, that passes in the theatre of Philadelphia, and an account of each night's performances, accompanied with a critical analysis of the play and after-piece, and remarks upon the merits of the actors. Nor shall the management of the stage, in any particular, escape observation. Thus the public will know what they owe to the manager and to the leader of each department, and those again what they owe to the public. To make THE MIRROR OF TASTE AND DRAMATIC CENSOR, as far as possible a general national work, measures have been taken to obtain from the capital cities, of the other states, a regular account of their theatrical transactions. To this will be added a register of the other public exhibitions, and, in general, of all the fashionable amusements of this city, and, from time to time, the sporting intelligence of the new and old country.

To the first part, which will be entitled "The Domestic Dramatic Censor," will succeed the "Foreign Dramatic Censor." This will contain a general account of all that passes in the theatres of Great Britain, likely to interest the fashionable world and *amateurs* of America, viz. the new pieces, whether play, farce, or interlude, with their prologues and epilogues, together with their character and reception there, and critiques on the acting, collected from the various opinions of the best critics, together with the amusing occurrences, anecdotes, bon-mots, and greenroom chitchat, scattered through the various periodical publications of England, Ireland, and Scotland.

The next head will be Stage Biography, under which the reader will find the lives and characters of the leading actors of both countries.

These will be followed by a miscellany collated from the foreign productions, catalogues of the best books and best compositions in music, published or preparing for publication in Europe or America, with concise reviews of such as have already appeared.

Poetry, of course, will be introduced ; not, as usual, under one head, but scattered in detached pieces through the whole.

TERMS.

The price of the Mirror will be eight dollars per annum, payable on the delivery of the sixth number.

A number will be issued every month, forming two volumes in the year.

To each number will be added, by way of appendix, an entire play or after-piece, printed in a small elegant type, and paged so as to be collected, at the end of each year, into a separate volume.

The work will be embellished with elegant engravings by the first artists.